

## **The Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice**

March 11, 2022

Dear Honored Co-Chairs Senator Cohen and Representative Gresko, Senator Haskell and Representative Lemar, and Distinguished Members of the Environment and Transportation Committees,

My name is Sharon Lewis and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental and Economic Justice (CCEEJ). I am writing this testimony today in support of Senate Bill 4: An Act Concerning the Connecticut Clean Air Act and House Bill 5039: An Act Concerning Medium and Heavy Duty Truck Standards.

Founded in 1998 by Dr Mark Mitchell, CCEEJ is a statewide coalition of diverse organizations and constituencies who possess the shared vision of leveling the scale of justice by abolishing the systemic and institutionalized laws which give rise to unequal environmental burdens borne by low-income and people of color. Our base consists of communities of color and low-income communities – who sacrifice their health and well-being from relentless exposure to deadly toxins spewing from the stacks of polluting industries in CT. As the result of generations of government sponsored segregation, redlining and being denied access to healthy environments, people in these communities are exposed to greater rates of life-altering pollution than society at large and experience higher rates of chronic diseases. That's why CCEEJ is fighting to ensure that clean air, safe drinking water, and healthy communities are accessible for our communities.

More than 330,000 children in Connecticut are transported on school buses to and from school everyday.<sup>1</sup> Of the 6,100 school buses used throughout the state, the majority of buses run on diesel fuel.<sup>2</sup> The burdens of diesel exhaust are not borne equally across communities in the state. 20 percent of low-income families (at or below the poverty line, defined as \$25,000 for a family of four) own no vehicles and over 70% of children from these families take a school bus to school, as compared to less than 50% of children who regularly ride the bus if their family is able to afford a vehicle.<sup>3</sup> What's more,

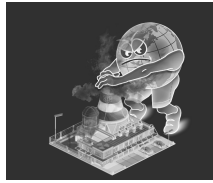
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<sup>1</sup>

[https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/PP\\_Policy/Documents/School-Bus-Safety#:~:text=More%20than%20330%2C000%20Connecticut%20children,a%20school%20bus%20every%20day.](https://portal.ct.gov/DOT/PP_Policy/Documents/School-Bus-Safety#:~:text=More%20than%20330%2C000%20Connecticut%20children,a%20school%20bus%20every%20day.)

<sup>2</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/air/diesel/docs/nhdieselretrofspdf.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bts.gov/topics/passenger-travel/back-school-2019>



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based on where diesel school buses and other vehicles tend to regularly drive and idle, the air pollution from vehicles in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions is, on average, 66% greater for communities of color than white residents.<sup>4</sup> Diesel school buses also pollute neighborhoods and school yards, releasing soot, toxic air pollutants, and heat-trapping carbon dioxide exacerbating the inequitable burden of air pollution in communities of color and low-income communities.<sup>5</sup>

The exhaust from diesel buses is a significant contributor to air pollution and has been classified as a probable human carcinogen by the EPA.<sup>6</sup> Diesel exhaust exacerbates asthma and causes inflammation of the airways and children are especially vulnerable to these devastating health impacts.<sup>7</sup> The more these dirty diesel school buses drive through environmental justice communities, the more our children have to take sick days and miss valuable educational opportunities at school. At CCEEJ, we believe that all students – regardless of race, class, ethnicity, income level, or identity – deserve to breathe clean air, and dirty diesel buses shouldn't endanger them in their daily journey to learn and grow in school.

Senate Bill 4: An Act Concerning the Connecticut Clean Air Act is an important step forward to make that vision a reality. Senate Bill 4 aims to reduce air pollution from transportation in Connecticut, especially in environmental justice communities that are disproportionately burdened by toxic pollution from traffic. The bill will require that all of the state's light duty vehicles be zero-emission by 2030; 100% zero-emission school buses in EJ communities by 2030 and the rest of state by 2035; by January 1, 2024, the state will cease to procure, purchase, or lease any diesel fueled transit bus; and will include e-bikes in the EV rebate program. While there is much more work ahead to equitably address the crisis of toxic pollution – especially in the context of the ever-worsening climate crisis – within environmental justice communities, Senate Bill 4 is an important step forward.

What's more, the overall transportation sector accounts for 37.4% of greenhouse gas emissions in Connecticut and is a major source of ground level air pollutants that harm public health.<sup>8</sup> Connecticut has a persistent ozone pollution problem and recent projections show that NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from diesel

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<sup>4</sup>

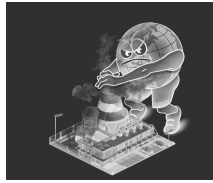
<https://www.wri.org/insights/electrifying-us-school-bus-fleet-how-put-children-first-zero-emission-transition>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.eschoolbus4kids.org/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemical\\_landing.cfm?substance\\_nmbr=642](https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemical_landing.cfm?substance_nmbr=642)

<sup>7</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/air/diesel/docs/nhdieselretrofspdf.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GHG\\_Emissions\\_Inventory\\_2018.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GHG_Emissions_Inventory_2018.pdf)



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trucks and buses will soon be the largest contributor to dangerous ozone pollution.<sup>9</sup> Diesel-powered trucks and buses also emit harmful organic compounds; diesel exhaust is a known carcinogen, and it has been found to cause adverse health impacts including lung cancer and worsening of chronic heart and lung diseases, such as asthma. Trucks and buses are a major source of air pollution and disproportionately contribute to NO<sub>x</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Recent analysis shows that while medium and heavy-duty vehicles are only 6% of the vehicles on the road in Connecticut, they emit 25% of the greenhouse gas emissions, 53% of the NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, and 45% of the PM emissions.<sup>10</sup>

As numerous studies underscore, the same patterns of diesel school bus pollution also mirror the ways that medium and heavy duty truck pollution is disproportionately concentrated in communities of color and low-income communities, and other environmental justice communities across the state.<sup>11</sup> In parts of the state with greater densities of communities of color – including Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford – the distribution of urban freeways was used to initially divide, extract wealth, and undermine the health of communities of color and low-income communities.<sup>12</sup> The structural racism evident in highway design not only divides communities of color and low-income communities, it also disproportionately exposes these communities to toxic emissions from vehicle exhaust. Years of discriminatory land use, racist zoning laws, and toxic transportation policies have resulted in Asian-American, Black, and Latino communities being disproportionately burdened with PM<sub>2.5</sub> air pollution from vehicles. A recent national report, *Asthma Capitals 2021*, ranked New Haven (#5) and Hartford (#17) among the 100 largest U.S. cities where it is most challenging to live with asthma.<sup>13</sup>

House Bill 5039: An Act Concerning Medium and Heavy Duty Truck Standards will allow Connecticut to reduce emissions from medium and heavy duty buses by adopting California's medium and heavy duty vehicle emission standards. Trucks and buses disproportionately contribute

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<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/air/mobile/EVConnecticut/2020-07-14---Multi-State-MHD-ZEV-MOU---Fact-Sheet.PDF>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/southern-ne-clean-trucks-report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ehn.org/diesel-truck-air-pollution-2655321340.html>;

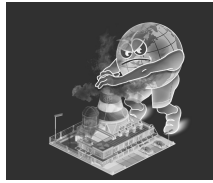
<https://blog.ucsusa.org/akash-singh/driving-away-dirty-air/>;

<https://www.washington.edu/news/2017/09/14/people-of-color-exposed-to-more-pollution-from-cars-trucks-power-plants-during-10-year-period/>

<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-broderick-urban-highways-0705-20200705-cue3spc3rbacni gp25c6iwtkhi-story.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.aafa.org/asthma-capitals/>



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to NO<sub>x</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, and PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution in Connecticut.<sup>14</sup> House Bill 5039 would go a long way towards addressing this problem and doing so by increasing cooperation with other New England states will multiply its impact. Under the Clean Air Act that Congress passed in 1963, only California has the authority to adopt emissions standards that are different from federal standards. No state can adopt their own emissions standards. However, states like Connecticut can adopt different standards by following what California has adopted.

For our communities' health and well-being, CCEEJ strongly urges all members of the Environment and Transportation Committees to support Senate Bill 4: An Act Concerning the Connecticut Clean Air Act and House Bill 5039: An Act Concerning Medium and Heavy Duty Truck Standards.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sharon Lewis

Executive Director

The Connecticut Coalition for Economic and Environmental Justice